

Don't Sing For Me

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Satou Mafuyu, Uenoyama Ritsuka, Yoshida Yuuki, Kashima Hiiragi, Yagi Shizusumi

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Don't Sing For Me

by [ifisoundsordid](#)

Summary

Assumes you've read up to at least chapter 37 of the manga (chapter 38 hinted at)

Uenoyama performs Yuki's song and Mafuyu has many feelings about it

This started as just a Uenoyama hurt/comfort, but now it's just a whole lot more.

Notes

Hi hi! This is my first fanfic so be nice please :)

It's very self-indulgent and this was essentially therapy because I haven't been able to get the thought of Uenoyama Hurt/Comfort out of my head.

I'll probably do another chapter as well because I want to fit in some Mafuyu comfort too but I couldn't find a place to fit it in naturally in this one.

Some Kind of Disaster

Mafuyu had only really come to SYH's show because Akihiko told him to. Apart from a good morning text most days, which Mafuyu rarely responded to, and a few conversations in hallways that he always was the first to walk away from, he and Uenoyama hadn't really talked recently. He knew that his sulking was making the situation worse, but he couldn't really help it. He didn't like his boyfriend making music without him. He was worse to Hiiragi, downright rude the few times Mafuyu responded to him. But unlike with Uenoyama, Mafuyu didn't feel guilty about that. It was all Hiiragi's fault anyway. But Uenoyama sent him a text yesterday that read:

Sorry for being so distant lately, I promise I'll make it up to you as soon as possible. I really hope you'll come to the show tomorrow, it'll be nice to see you outside of school. I miss you x

He knew enough about his boyfriend to know that the 'I miss you x' at the end probably meant Uenoyama had stewed over sending it for a very long time and had probably gotten very red and embarrassed in the process, and the thought of that made him smile. Just for a second. He had already pretty much decided to go because of Akihiko, but he had to admit to himself that the text was what decided it for him. He considered not replying just to make Uenoyama suffer a bit more but sent back a quick 'I miss you too' before he could stop himself. Because he did miss him. He missed him a lot.

So he came. He saw both Hiiragi and Uenoyama's eyes searching for him as they walked on stage and saw in their reactions when they saw him, sitting on a table by himself at the back. Hiiragi beamed and waved at him, and Shizusumi (who was always staring at Hiiragi) followed the direction of Hiiragi's wave and saw him too, giving him a nod. Uenoyama's shoulders visibly relaxed when he saw Mafuyu, and the small shy smile he gave him made Mafuyu's heart flutter just a little bit. And then the band started to play, and Mafuyu was glad he was sitting down.

Torn between admiration of his childhood friends' talent, the anguish that Yuki wasn't with them when he *should have been*, and the pride that the other two were able to keep going despite that. He could hear Yuki in Hiiragi's voice, in the rise and fall of the melodies and the brashness of Shizu's drums and it made him so happy and so achingly sad at the same time. And that mess of emotions was without

considering the complete battery of feelings Uenoyama was giving him. Jealousy, resentment, envy, pride, attraction, surprise, admiration, adoration, anger. He knew Uenoyama was good, he knew first-hand how talented Uenoyama was. And he knew what Uenoyama looked like playing the guitar, had watched him enraptured for what was probably something like days at this point. But Mafuyu has never seen him on stage before, at least not from the audience. From this point of view, Uenoyama is the coolest thing he's ever seen. He's brighter than the stage lights that pour down on him. It's like the first time he saw him play, the day Mafuyu followed him to practise, but a million times more. Uenoyama is at his most cocky, his most self-assured, that sly smirk spreading across that face. That dangerous, dangerous smile. Mafuyu can't help getting up from his table and walking towards the crowd, just so he can see it closer. That *smile* is one of Mafuyu's favourite expressions that Uenoyama makes. It makes his fingers tingle.

The rest of Mafuyu's surroundings start to fade out a little as he stares at Uenoyama from the edge of the crowd. A sudden possessiveness creeps its way into his heart, that's *mine*. *Mine, mine, mine*. He wants to take Uenoyama away, away and out of sight. Away from Hiiragi and Shizu, away from the place Yuki should have been, away from the eyes of all the girls and all the *guys* looking him up and down. He wants to take him and put him in his pocket and keep him and all of his talent for himself. He wants to *touch*, to place Uenoyama under his hands and keep him there. He slowly makes his way forward through the crowd as the band makes their way through their songs, wanting, *needing* to be closer to Uenoyama. But as Mafuyu catches glimpses of the faces of those watching his boyfriend, the possessiveness is replaced by pride. The jealousy that he's making music with someone else is replaced by the joy he gets from listening to Uenoyama play. Everyone should see this, everyone should get to witness Uenoyama Ritsuka once in their life. He's sad that Yuki never got to meet him. They probably would have been friends, bouncing off each other's talent. In another life, Mafuyu would have got to hear the incredible music those two would have made together.

His heart jumps every time Uenoyama makes eye contact with him, but it happens less and less as the set goes on and Mafuyu gets closer. As Mafuyu gets closer, he realises something is *wrong*. It's almost as if Uenoyama's guitar is getting heavier as the set goes on. He's shrinking in on himself, and the cocky smile is gone from his face. Mafuyu can't pinpoint his expression until he's almost at the very front of the crowd, practically underneath him. It's lost, and a little *scared*, and he won't look at Mafuyu even though he's right there. Uenoyama looks

exhausted, and there's small streaks of red on his guitar strings where the skin of his fingertips have cracked and started to bleed. He's in pain, his boy is in pain and Mafuyu can't for the life of him figure out why. That is, until Hiiragi announces their last song.

"Alright guys!" Hiiragi says beaming, all stage bravado. "This next song is going to be our last."

The crowd boos and Hiiragi giggles. Mafuyu sees Shizusumi roll his eyes, but Hiiragi's tone becomes more serious as he continues,

"Those of you who have been following our band for a while will know that we tragically lost our original guitarist over a year ago now."

All of the air leaves Mafuyu's lungs, and the crowd is eerily silent,

"Unfortunately, he didn't manage to finish writing one of his songs—" Hiiragi quickly gives a worried side glance to Uenoyama, more worried than Mafuyu would think Hiiragi could manage to be for Uenoyama.

"—but our *temporary* guitarist here Uenoyama finished it for us! Now, this isn't a song I feel able to sing, so he's going to be taking it from here. Thank you guys for coming!"

No. *No, no, no, no.*

"We miss you Yuki." Hiiragi adds, managing to sound quiet even through a microphone and even through his panic Mafuyu can see intense way Shizusumi stares at Hiiragi as he swaps places with Uenoyama. Now Hiiragi is standing directly above Mafuyu, and Uenoyama is in the middle of the stage in front of the microphone. Mafuyu makes eye contact with Hiiragi for a second, and Hiiragi's eyes are full of something almost like regret as he mouths to Mafuyu,

"I'm sorry."

Mafuyu can barely even begin to process that, as he tears his eyes away from Hiiragi and stares at his boyfriend instead, who looks like he's almost about to pass out. He looks at Mafuyu once, and it feels as if the world is about to end.

The song starts and he smells the ocean. Feels the cold, feels the wind.

"*Nah, you're gonna forget.*" rings in Mafuyu's head, as he looks up on

stage and sees not Uenoyama but Yuki looking at him with eyes that say ‘I told you so’.

No! I haven't forgotten! Not yet, not yet, not yet. I don't want to forget.

“*Nah, you're gonna forget.*” he hears again, and again, and again, and the way Yuki is looking at him is wrong. He looks wrong. He's too tall and his eyes are too sad. Yuki never let his eyes look that sad. His guitar is the wrong colour. Mafuyu's eyes snap to the blood on the strings and suddenly it's not Yuki anymore, it's *Uenoyama*. Just Uenoyama, trying to be Yuki. The guilt of it nearly knocks Mafuyu over, both for mistaking Uenoyama for Yuki and the fact that Uenoyama felt he had to try and be Yuki in the first place. Uenoyama's voice is beautiful, he's so beautiful, and the song is beautiful, but this isn't the reason he should be hearing Uenoyama sing for the first time. This isn't the beautiful music Yuki and Uenoyama would have made together, because there's no Uenoyama in it. Mafuyu doesn't hear him at all. Once upon a time he wouldn't have cared, would have been happy just to hear Yuki, but now Mafuyu wants to cry because *Uenoyama is playing but he doesn't hear Uenoyama at all*. By trying to fill the hole Yuki left, he's created a Uenoyama-shaped hole.

Mafuyu moves from underneath Hiiragi, trying to get closer to Uenoyama again. He's once again struck by the desire to *touch*, but not from possessiveness this time. He wants to take Uenoyama and cradle him gently, protect him from whatever ugly thoughts made him feel he had to do this. Mafuyu knows in his heart that Uenoyama is only doing this because he thinks it's what *Mafuyu wants*, but he's *wrong*. He's wrong. He wants Uenoyama back. *His* Uenoyama back.

The song ends before Mafuyu can get underneath him, and he's stuck between the urge to run to the stage door where he knows the band will exit and waiting where he is for an encore. He knows Hiiragi would love the showmanship of an encore, but he recalls Uenoyama's crumpled frame and knows that he won't be coming back for another song, so he pushes his way through the crowd to the door on the side of the stage where another small crowd of fans have already gathered. Hiiragi and Shizu exit from the door and immediately spot Mafuyu, apologize to a few fans and make their way towards him.

Hiiragi gets to him first, “Mafuyu! Did you enjoy the sh—”

“I can't believe you made him do that!” Mafuyu shouts, surprising himself, everyone around him, and Hiiragi. Not Shizu though, who

looks almost like he was expecting it.

“Wha—”

“You made him finish the song, Yuki’s song! You *made* him—”

“I didn’t *make* him do anyth—”

“In all fairness, you did.” Shizusumi interrupts.

Hiiragi glares at Shizu, “*Oh everything is always my fault! You—*”

Mafuyu interrupts Hiiragi before he can start arguing with Shizu, because *clearly* there’s something else going on there, “Where’s Uenoyama-kun?”

“He went out the back door.” Shizusumi replies.

With that Mafuyu turns away from his childhood best friends and is running, pushing his way through people and spilling a few of their drinks but not taking any time to apologise. He crashes through the front door and makes his way around the side of the building and there he is. Uenoyama, alone.

“Uenoyama-kun.” Mafuyu says softly, trying not to let his voice tremble. Uenoyama is sat on the wall just outside the back of the venue, facing him but with his head turned down, fringe covering his face. His shoulders are shaking. When he hears Mafuyu speak however, he stands up and turns around,

“Don’t look at me.” He half shouts, half sobs.

He’s crying, Mafuyu thinks in shock. Uenoyama, his rock, the idiot who never thinks about anything but music *is crying. Because of him. Because of music.* Mafuyu’s stomach drops, and he curses himself for not realising, for misunderstanding everything about Uenoyama Ritsuka. The boy who stood on stage with ashen skin and bleeding fingertips and gave his everything to try and fit his body into the jagged hole Yuki left behind. Uenoyama Ritsuka was not put on this Earth to fill a hole left by someone else, he was put on this Earth to carve his own space in Mafuyu’s heart. Which he has, which he *does. Everyday.* When he smiles at his hands on the neck of his guitar, when he panics at the slightest hint of affection but gives it freely anyway, when he clutches at the back of Mafuyu’s shirt and tells him he doesn’t have to cry by himself. Everyday Uenoyama creates his own separate space in Mafuyu’s heart; a space separate from Yuki’s.

Separate. Because they aren't the same and he doesn't want them to be the same and Mafuyu realises with sudden horrifying clarity that he's never told Uenoyama this. Uenoyama takes and takes and takes all of the pain that Mafuyu gives him and never says a word to complain and Mafuyu *aches* when he realises he never gives anything back. Because in his head, he does. In his head, he tells Uenoyama that he loves him 100 times a day. From his raspy voice to his undercut to the way all of his movements seem musical. He loves him *so much*. Does he really never say it? Does Uenoyama not know that everyday Mafuyu is saved simply because he exists?

"Uenoyama-kun." He tries again, walking up behind him and placing his hand on his back. Now that Mafuyu is closer, he can hear Uenoyama's quiet sobs. They get louder when Mafuyu says his name.

"I don't want you to see me like this. I'm fine."

"You're not fine."

"I am fine!" he shouts through his sobs. The sound is filled with such pain Mafuyu's heart can barely take it.

"You're not fine!" Mafuyu shouts back. Uenoyama takes a large shuddering breath at Mafuyu's sudden change in volume and lets Mafuyu turn him around. He has his hands covering his face and won't let Mafuyu remove them no matter how much he pulls at his hands. His hands are wet with his tears.

"Did you like the song?" Uenoyama chokes out.

"I hated it."

Mafuyu means to keep speaking, but after that statement Uenoyama's knees buckle and he sinks down into a crouch on the dirty pavement. Mafuyu goes down with him, clutching at Uenoyama's shirt.

"No, no, no, I mean—" Mafuyu takes a deep breath, hating himself for never knowing the right words, "You're not Yuki, don't try to be Yuki."

"I know!" Uenoyama shouts again, "I know I'll never be him, I'll never live up to that! But I wanted to help you! I wanted to make you happy, I—" his words dissolve into sobs again as he cries harder, and Mafuyu desperately scrabbles at the hands covering his face. His eyes. Mafuyu just needs to look him in the eyes.

“You do, you do make me happy.” He says softly again, trying not to sound desperate. Uenoyama doesn’t respond. Just stays with his forehead to his knees, hands on his eyes, trying so hard to make his sobs silent.

“You’re not Yuki, but I don’t want you to be Yuki. You’re *Ritsuka*.”

Ritsuka’s breath hitches, and he finally *finally* lets Mafuyu remove his hands from his face. His eyes, *God his eyes*. Puffy and brilliant red from crying, and ringed with purple from who knows how many nights of rough sleep, but the same clear blue as always. The blue he sees in his dreams, blue that means hope.

“*Ritsuka*. I want *Ritsuka*. The boy I fell in love with on a stairwell. I chose him, I want *him*.” Ritsuka seems to have momentarily stopped crying, and his blue eyes are fixed on Mafuyu’s orange ones so Mafuyu keeps speaking,

“The song was beautiful. But there wasn’t any *Ritsuka* in it. And you weren’t smiling. You love music, you’re supposed to be smiling.”

Ritsuka stares helplessly at Mafuyu for a little longer before he speaks again, “I stopped loving it, before I met you. You made me love music again.”

It’s barely more than a whisper but Mafuyu’s heart unclenches a little at Ritsuka’s voice speaking again. What Ritsuka says doesn’t really fit well with the picture of him he has in his mind, the boy who’s entire being seems to be made of music. But on the other hand, it *does* almost fit the boy he met on the stairwell, with his sleepy eyes and no guitar on his back.

“You *are* music Ritsuka. Music took everything away from me once, but you came along and you taught me how to use it to save myself. Loving music and loving you is the same thing. I love music, and I love you, and—”

“You love me?”

Mafuyu stops, and tilts his head, “Of course I love you.” Does he not *know*?

He looks at Mafuyu, lost “*Me*? Are you sure...? But I’m—”

“I love you.” Mafuyu interrupts him, “I’m very sure.”

Ritsuka blinks once and swallows, before his eyes start filling up again. But before Mafuyu can do anything, Ritsuka is reaching for him and slots his head into the crook of Mafuyu's neck. Mafuyu's arms come up around his boyfriend's wide shoulders as Ritsuka finally lets himself cry without repressing it. It's loud and it's raw and it's painful to hear but Mafuyu lets himself feel it, pressing his cheek to the top of Ritsuka's head and sobbing too. The pavement is cold, and it's starting to drizzle, adding to the dampness he feels from Ritsuka's tears on his t-shirt. God, they're both so *stupid*. The ache in his heart gets more painful as he listens to his boyfriend's crying, knowing it's because of him. Ritsuka doesn't deserve to feel like this, Ritsuka only deserves good, soft things and Mafuyu isn't any of that. But even though the ache in his chest is almost unbearable, Mafuyu is glad he can feel like this now. Glad he can cry like this. He would take these raw, visceral, disgusting emotions a million times before he would rather feel the frozen, unchanging numbness he felt for months after Yuki left. For better or worse, Ritsuka makes him *feel*. He loves him with shocking intensity, and did he *really not know*? How can he not know? Surely, Mafuyu tells him. Surely, Mafuyu has told him a million times by now. But when he really thinks about it, has he ever said it out loud? He can't really remember if he ever told Yuki either, and that thought hits him like a hammer in the chest, causing him to scrunch his eyes against the force of it. But as his thoughts once again shift to Yuki, he remembers the song Ritsuka fought so hard just to get through and comes to the conclusion that maybe Mafuyu was so distracted by his own grief that he didn't realise that the shadow of Yuki probably hangs over Ritsuka too. Telling him he'll never live up to what came before, and that's *another* hammer to Mafuyu's chest. He squeezes Ritsuka even tighter, and thanks every star that they sit under that this boy is still here. That he didn't lose another one of his soulmates due to his own stupidity.

They sit like that for a while, desperately clutching to each other's shaking bodies just to stay grounded. *You're here. We're here. We're okay.* But eventually they calm down, and Mafuyu unpeels his numb hands from the other boy's shirt and starts stroking the sweaty hair of his undercut until Ritsuka suddenly lifts his head from Mafuyu's chest,

"I'm sorry." he rasps,

Mafuyu tilts his head, absentmindedly wiping away the leftover tears on Ritsuka's cheeks, "What for?"

“I should have told you about the song, I should have just *told* you I was feeling insecure—”

“No it’s my fault for letting you feel insecure in the first place—”

“But it was a stupid thing to get insecure about—”

“It’s not *stupid*, I should have—”

“No, it’s my—”

“*Ritsuka.*”

And Ritsuka finally smiles. A small one, but a smile nonetheless. He raises a hand to scratch at the back of his neck only to find Mafuyu’s hand in the way,

“We should probably communicate a bit better huh? Haruki would be mad at us right now.”

Mafuyu huffs a little chuckle, “Mmm he would. But Haruki-san is always mad at us.”

“We kind of deserve it you know.”

“We do. I’m sorry.”

Ritsuka smiles again, and his face is a mess but he’s so blindingly beautiful, “I’m sorry too.”

With that, Mafuyu scoots forwards to place his forehead on Ritsuka’s and places both hands on either side of his jaw. It’s a little stubbly, he’s surprised to find. He didn’t know Ritsuka grew stubble. He inches closer agonisingly slowly, giving him all the time in the world to back away if it’s too much. If he needs more time to recover from the pain Mafuyu has given him. But Ritsuka closes the last few millimetres himself and places his lips on Mafuyu’s. They’re chapped, and a little salty, but it’s been so long since they’ve kissed that he almost forgot how good it feels. How it ignites a little sun inside of his chest and burns all the bad feelings away. He cradles Ritsuka’s face softly, as if it were his heart. Because even though everyone thinks Mafuyu is fragile, maybe Ritsuka is a little fragile too, and he should treat his heart with more care. A soft summer boy who has trusted Mafuyu with all of his firsts, and Mafuyu is so *grateful*. They kiss and they kiss and they kiss and they kiss and it’s so soft and so gentle and so *good*. He’s so good. Everything about him is good.

Ritsuka is the one to break the kiss, “Mmm Mafuyu? I love you too by the way.”

Mafuyu is already leaning back in and huffs against the boys lips, “I know Ritsuka.”

Ritsuka chuckles lightly, a wonderful deep warm sound, “You know you’re never allowed to call me Uenoyama ever again.”

Mafuyu suddenly wraps his arms round his neck and kisses him once on the lips, hard, and then peppers the other boy’s face with kisses chanting “*Ritsuka, Ritsuka, Ritsuka,*” between each one until eventually the boy groans, embarrassment getting the better of him, hands coming up to cover his face. Mafuyu giggles and stops Ritsuka’s hands before they can find their target, because this is the facial expression Mafuyu loves best. His boyfriend pink to the tips of his ears, lips pressed together, eyebrows slanted down but looking at him with same fierce determination he gets when playing a particularly hard part of a song. It makes Mafuyu feel warm inside and out, and the cold that had been threatening to push its way back in the past few weeks thaws once again. Ritsuka isn’t Yuki, and music isn’t painful anymore.

Mafuyu pokes Ritsuka’s cheek, “You know you’re really hot when you’re on stage.”

“Fucking hell,” Ritsuka groans, this time managing to cover his face, “You can’t say that.”

“Why not? I’m your boyfriend, aren’t I? Am I not allowed to find you hot?”

He groans again, peaking an eye out through his fingers, “You are, you just can’t tell me.”

“But I want to tell you.”

“Then you can’t expect me to react normally.”

“I don’t.”

“You! –“ Ritsuka exclaims, in that half-angry half-embarrassed way he always does, but Mafuyu kisses him before he can say anymore, effectively shutting him up.

“Stop toying with me,” he says, eventually pulling away from

Mafuyu's lips,

"But it's fun."

"Shut up." Ritsuka tries to look angry, but its effectiveness is undermined by the fierce blush on his cheeks and the fondness in his eyes. Mafuyu loves him *so much*.

Ritsuka gets up off the pavement and offers a hand to Mafuyu to pull him up too, using the other hand to scratch at the back of his head.

"Ritsuka?"

"Mmm?"

"I think we should debut."

Ritsuka looks at him, dumbfounded, and the expression is so familiar on his face it almost makes Mafuyu laugh, but he keeps his poker face.

"What?"

"I think we should debut."

"Really?"

"Really."

And Ritsuka sweeps him up into a hug that lifts him up and spins him around, in a gesture that feels out of character for Ritsuka but similar to the actions of another boy once, a long time ago. Mafuyu still has grieving to do, and scars to heal, but as he listens to the heartbeat of the very alive, very present boy with his strong arms around him, he lets himself let go just a little bit. Making new memories doesn't make the old ones any less special, and both boys can occupy separate parts of his heart at the same time. He has room enough for both. As his feet find the ground again, he stares up at the blinding light that is Uenoyama Ritsuka smiling a smile wider than he's ever seen before. He never thought he'd get the opportunity to be this happy ever again, but now that he has it he wants to sink his nails in. Never let it go. Do whatever it takes to keep it with him. Music and Ritsuka. They're the same thing.

Ritsuka stoops his head slightly to give Mafuyu a quick, chaste kiss on the lips before taking his hand, blushing profusely,

"Let me walk you home."

“But it’s always you walking me home, never the other way around.”

“I know, but I want to see Kedama, it’s been ages.”

“It has. He’s missed you.”

Ritsuka squeezes his hand, “I’ve missed him too.”

Cocoon

Chapter Summary

Uenoyama finishes Yuki's song and Mafuyu has a lot of feelings about it, and the aftermath.

ALTERNATIVELY, Uenoyama finally gets some comfort :(<3

Chapter Notes

Okay so I know I said that I was only gonna do one more chapter, but I think I'm going to do a deep deep dive into Mafuyu's trauma, which will be like....pain for me and everyone else, so I wanted to write a short little happy fluffy thing in the middle to make it easier on everyone.

Hope y'all enjoy <3

“Ah shit! My guitar! Wait here two secs!”

Mafuyu and Ritsuka had just rounded the corner of the venue when Ritsuka exclaimed this, dropping Mafuyu's hand and bolting in the opposite direction. Mafuyu giggled as he watched him go, surprised that it took either of them this long to notice. Something about Ritsuka's gait was strangely off without the weight of the guitar on his back, and the lack of it made him look smaller somehow. The change from their first meeting, when Ritsuka didn't have his guitar at all, to now when the lack of a guitar made him look incomplete, had happened quite subtly but signified something quite important in Mafuyu's mind. Whatever bad thoughts he has about himself, he can at least take pride in the fact that he played a part in his boyfriend rediscovering his passion for music. Music and Ritsuka are so inextricably linked in Mafuyu's mind that he can't imagine one without the other, so the idea of Ritsuka just...stopping, going silent, is a reality that Mafuyu would do anything to stop happening. No doubt would it be a loss of part of Ritsuka himself, but to the world and to Mafuyu too. Everyone should get to hear his music, Mafuyu thinks. He thinks it could change the world.

He doesn't have to wait long though until he hears Ritsuka's steps coming back, considerably louder than they were before.

“Sorry to make you wait,” he pants, “I ran into Hiiragi inside, he

asked about you. He seems pretty upset.”

Mafuyu takes his hand again and they start walking, “You noticed?”

“Oi. I’m not that dumb.”

“Hmmm. He has Shizu-chan, he’ll be fine.”

“I don’t know, I think they’ve fallen out or something. They haven’t been speaking at practise, it’s been awkward as hell.”

“Ahh,” that’s news to Mafuyu but then again, he hasn’t exactly been pleasant to Hiiragi lately, “Lovers quarrel?”

Ritsuka stops, “Huh?”

Mafuyu can’t believe him, “Ritsuka. Come on.”

“Them too?”

“I mean, not officially. But yeah.”

Ritsuka starts moving again, “For fuck’s sake, why is everyone gay?”

“*Ritsuka.*” Mafuyu raises their linked hands and waves them in front of his face and he blushes once again.

“Ah right. Yes. Fair point. That was a pretty dumb thing to say, huh?”
Ritsuka goes to rub his eyes with his hands, and that’s when Mafuyu remembers about his fingers bleeding on the guitar strings.

“Your fingers...”

“Ah. You noticed?”

Mafuyu doesn’t respond, just takes Ritsuka’s other hand and inspects the skin on his fingertips. The skin on the calluses is very dry, cracked and still bleeding in some places and blistered in others. Mafuyu prods one a bit too hard accidentally and Ritsuka winces.

“Ah, don’t worry. They look worse than they are.”

“You should take better care of yourself.”

“I’m fi—” the stare Mafuyu hits him with must be particularly stern because he backtracks, “Right. Yes sir. You’re right. I will.”

Mafuyu gives him back his hand, “We have plasters at home, I’ll fix you up when we get in.”

“Thank you.” Ritsuka squeezes his hand, and Mafuyu quickly goes up his tiptoes to kiss his boyfriend on the cheek, just because its fun to make him blush.

The rest of the walk back to Mafuyu’s the two of them catch up. Ritsuka talks about the various arguments he has with Hiiragi and how Yayoi has been nicer since she started dating Take, and Mafuyu talks about Akihiko’s new apartment, how Kedama has been, and how his mum has changed to night shifts.

“She probably won’t be home when we get there, so you could stay the night.”

“R-right.” Ritsuka stammers, “I’ll phone my parents when we get in and ask.”

Mafuyu figures it’s probably better to introduce the idea now so Ritsuka has time to get used to it, rather than later when he’s already panicking inside Mafuyu’s apartment. Satisfying his need to be close to Ritsuka whilst dancing around how easily flustered he gets is hard work, but Mafuyu has to admit it’s also very funny. Ritsuka gets quieter and quieter the closer they get to Mafuyu’s apartment, so Mafuyu distracts him by talking about their debut which works *reasonably* well right up until they first enter Mafuyu’s front door.

Tama completely ignores Mafuyu and runs up to Ritsuka immediately, making the boy laugh. He scoops him up in his arms and just manages to regain upright posture again before he stops, probably just realising that he is in fact alone with Mafuyu in his apartment. Mafuyu secretly finds this very amusing but keeps his face straight as he gives his boyfriend a minute to adjust. He takes off his shoes and jacket, but after a minute Ritsuka still hasn’t rebooted so Mafuyu tries to help him out a little.

“You good?”

It takes him a second, but “Y-yeah, I’m fine.”

“Shoes? Guitar? Parents?”

“Yes! Right! Okay!”

“You do that. I’m gonna tidy my room just a little.”

Mafuyu goes into his room, leaving Ritsuka alone to sort himself out just a little bit. After about a minute, he hears muffled conversation of what must be Ritsuka on the phone to his parents, so Mafuyu figures he's probably okay. He kicks a few dirty clothes under his bed, throws a few things in the bin and decides that's about passable before he goes out into the hallway again.

Ritsuka is sat in the middle of the floor in the hallway, Tama in his lap. The back of his hair is sticking up all over place, probably from him nervously raking his hands through it, so Mafuyu goes over to flatten it only for Ritsuka to lean into his touch and close his eyes.

"My parents say it's okay for me to stay."

Mafuyu's heart swells a little, "That's good. Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he sighs, "I'm just realising now how tired I am."

"That makes sense." The poor boy was crying his eyes not even an hour ago, and who knows the last time he had a good night's sleep. "Do you want to go to bed?"

Ritsuka peeks one eye open and looks at him, "Do you mind if I have a shower first? I feel kind of gross. I probably smell."

Mafuyu giggles, "You're okay, don't worry. But sure, I'll get you some clothes."

Ritsuka takes Mafuyu's hand and kisses it as he walks past, in a gesture of sleepy affection that he probably wouldn't manage if he was fully awake, but Mafuyu's hand tingles for a long time after Ritsuka goes to take his shower. He comes out with his hair all wet and dishevelled, borrowed t-shirt considerably tighter than it would be on Mafuyu and it's all together *far too handsome* and Mafuyu has to look away for a second, wearing a blush that's typically more at home on Ritsuka's cheeks.

"Sit on the bed, let me fix your fingers."

Ritsuka does so, very obediently, never taking his eyes off Mafuyu's flushing face as he tenderly wraps each finger of his left hand in a plaster.

He then kisses each fingertip, then a kiss on his forehead and a kiss on the tip of his nose, whispering "I love you" between each one. He's going to say 'I love you' to Ritsuka thousands upon thousands of times

to make up for all the times he didn't say it before, not just to this boy but the boy before him too.

"You're on guitar break now."

"Okay." Ritsuka whispers, not really able to say anything else, just staring up at Mafuyu with shining eyes, pupils dilated to take up most of his irises, light pink dusting his cheekbones. *So pretty. So unfairly pretty.* He wraps his arms around Mafuyu's waist, burying his face into his chest, and Mafuyu wraps his arms around Ritsuka's neck, pushing his hands into his hair and burying his face into the top of his head. They both take a deep breath in and Mafuyu can feel the muscles in the other boy's back relaxing. Ritsuka smells like a mix of his normal self and Mafuyu's shampoo. Two comforts, two safe spaces, two homes mixed into one. They stay like that for a while listening to each other breathe, and Mafuyu thinks he would be content to stay like this for the rest of his life. In this room with Ritsuka, no-one bothering them, just this safe little bubble they've created between them. It's warm, and Mafuyu wants to live in it forever. Ritsuka's breathing has become so rhythmic Mafuyu isn't sure whether or not he's still awake, until he raises his head to look up at Mafuyu once again,

"Do you want me to sleep on the floor?"

"No."

"Then whe—"

"In the bed."

"Then where are you gonna—"

"In the bed."

"But it's a single."

"Is that a problem?"

"No! No I mean—" Ritsuka buries his head into Mafuyu's chest again for a second to collect himself before resurfacing, "You can be really pushy sometimes you know?"

But he smiles up at Mafuyu with such a rueful affection that Mafuyu can't help but smile back. He takes one hand out of Ritsuka's hair and instead strokes his cheek.

“If it makes you uncomfortable then of course—”

“No, no! I mean,” he hesitates, “I want to, I just didn’t know if I was... I don’t know. Allowed?”

Mafuyu sighs sadly, because he knows that that’s his fault. He pulls Ritsuka into his chest again, tracing his fingers down his back and whispering into the top of his head,

“You’re allowed. You’re always allowed.”

He can feel Ritsuka smile against him before he lets Mafuyu go, moving to lie down in the bed. Mafuyu follows him and manoeuvres himself to lie on top of Ritsuka’s chest, listening to his heartbeat. Ritsuka himself seems to have frozen slightly, but Mafuyu knows he’ll calm down in a second.

“Your heartbeat is really fast.” Mafuyu muses,

“Mmm I wonder why.” Ritsuka replies in a strained voice.

Mafuyu raises himself up to look at him, “You okay?”

“Everything smells like you.”

Mafuyu tilts his head, “Does it smell bad?”

“No!” Ritsuka covers his face with his forearm, “Ahh this is so embarrassing! It’s not bad, it’s...good. It’s just...a lot.”

“Do you want me to get off you?”

“No!” he quickly places his hands on Mafuyu’s back to keep him there, and his face is brilliant red, “Just! Shhh a second. I’m trying to figure out where I’m allowed to put my hands.”

Now, Mafuyu should really stop teasing his boyfriend, but he raises one eyebrow anyway, “You can do whatever you want with your hands.”

A small, strangled scream makes its way out of Ritsuka, and he goes even *redder*, as if that’s even *possible*, and throws his head back into the pillows. Mafuyu is struck with the sudden urge to bite his newly exposed Adam’s apple, but resists because he doesn’t want to give his boyfriend an actual aneurysm.

“You’re doing this on purpose.”

Mafuyu finally gives in and releases his giggles into Ritsuka's chest, "Maybe a little bit."

Ritsuka lightly smacks the back of Mafuyu's head, "That's not fair."

Mafuyu pouts, and decides to be cruel again. He crawls up Ritsuka's chest but stops an inch away from his lips and whispers,

"I'm training you to get used to it."

Ritsuka seems to have lost the ability to speak, but his breathing changes considerably at the new proximity. He stares almost challengingly at Mafuyu with dilated eyes, before his eyes flicker down to fixate on his lips. Waiting.

But Mafuyu doesn't do it. He hangs there tantalisingly close until he breaks and presses his face giggling into Ritsuka's neck.

His boyfriend breathes out a "Fuck." as one long breath, but starts laughing too, bringing his hand up to stroke Mafuyu's hair. And Mafuyu was going to leave it there and let them go to sleep, he really was. But Ritsuka's neck *smells so good* he can't help kissing it a little bit. And Ritsuka makes a noise. A small, involuntary little noise. So Mafuyu does it again, interested. And he makes another noise. So he does it again, and again, and more noises come out, until suddenly Ritsuka has both hands in his hair and pulls Mafuyu into a kiss that causes his thoughts to blank out. Just like the first kiss. Now most of the time, Mafuyu is aware he holds a lot of the power in this relationship. He feels guilty about it, but it can't necessarily be helped. He's done this before, whereas Ritsuka hasn't. He knows that with time Ritsuka will get more confident and it'll even out, but until then Mafuyu needs to be patient with him. But every now and then Ritsuka will do something that leaves Mafuyu totally powerless. Helpless, pliant and malleable. His conscious thoughts blink out and he just gets pulled along in the tide. Whatever Ritsuka wants, he'll do it. But the funny thing is, whenever this happens Mafuyu doesn't *care* how powerless he is. He trusts him. So when Ritsuka kisses him like this, he willingly lets his thoughts go. Loses himself in lips that are chapped but so *soft* at the same time. His scent, his arms, the rise and fall of the body beneath him. The kisses harden and get deeper, but then soften. Like the tide going out. They soften until it dissolves into the two boys in love laughing against each other's lips.

"Maybe we should sleep now." Ritsuka says, and his voice is more husky than usual. It sends a little electric shock down Mafuyu's spine.

“Maybe we should.”

The boys reposition themselves for sleep. Mafuyu on his side, nuzzled into Ritsuka’s neck with one arm and one leg thrown over his body. Ritsuka on his back, one hand stroking Mafuyu’s hair and the other interlaced with Mafuyu’s on his chest.

“Mmm, your hair is so soft.” Ritsuka whispers, absentmindedly,

Mafuyu giggles, and nuzzles his nose in closer. He smells *so good*. “I love you.” he whispers back,

Mafuyu can hear rather than see the smile in Ritsuka’s voice when he replies, “I love you too.” turning his head slightly to kiss him on the forehead, “Goodnight Mafuyu.”

“Goodnight Ritsuka.”

It turns out, when Ritsuka is half asleep and happy he makes content little noises like a cat. Mafuyu can’t help but smile against his skin at how cute he is. He loves this boy *so much*. Although he’s happy, with the amount of memories brought up this evening he assumes this will be another night insomnia takes from him. But he’s content to listen to his boyfriend’s breathing and the faint beating of his heart. He listens to Ritsuka’s heart rate slow down as he goes from half-asleep to a deep slumber. His heart is just another type of music that Ritsuka makes, and this proof that the boy beneath him is alive is so soothing that before Mafuyu even knows it, he’s fast asleep.

Sick of Losing Soulmates

Chapter Summary

Let's all talk about our trauma, shall we?

Yuki is talked about in this one a lot, so tw for suicide

Chapter Notes

This hurt me! Writing this hurt me! So! Much! But in a good way, that good healing pain.

I really started writing this just wanting to give Uenoyama some comfort, but then it didn't feel complete without giving Mafuyu some too.

I hope you all enjoyed this, sorry if I made anyone cry. I'll probably stick to writing fluff in future, cuz yeah...ouch.

Sitting on a swing...endlessly. With you, always...until the end of time.

Mafuyu rocks himself slowly back and forwards on the all-too-familiar swing, waiting. The recurring dreams he had when Yuki left of the swings used to haunt him, but they happen less frequently these days. They don't scare him anymore. Now he only has them when Yuki has something to say.

"So you finally heard the song, huh?" Yuki beams at him from the swing to his left, "Did you like it?"

Mafuyu hums and looks at his hands, not sure what to say. Scared of hurting a dead boy's feelings.

"That bad?"

Mafuyu looks up in surprise, but Yuki's smiling. He's only teasing. Of course he's only teasing. "It was beautiful."

"But...?"

"But..." Mafuyu takes a deep breath, "He shouldn't have been the one to sing it."

"No," Mafuyu looks at Yuki, whilst Yuki looks at the sky, "he shouldn't. I

don't even know how he managed to finish it. He just...understood. In a way no one ever has before."

"Even me?"

Yuki looks at him, and his eyes are sad in a way he's never let them look sad before, "Even you."

Mafuyu shuts his eyes and swallows, unable to say anymore.

"He's a good kid. You should be nicer to him."

Mafuyu nods.

"That hole in your heart...it's getting smaller. It won't close completely, but..." Yuki chuckles, "It's a good thing really. It was too big of a space for just me, I was rattling around a bit. It was lonely."

"Are you lonely?"

"Less than I was" He smiles at him, "I'm okay Mafuyu...I'm okay now."

Mafuyu nods again. It hurts. He's stuck between wanting to wake up to a place where it's safe and warm and wanting to cling onto the last threads of Yuki's existence.

"It's getting warmer in here too. It's like summer is just around the corner." Yuki is smiling at him softly, because he knows, and he wants Mafuyu to know it's okay.

"You should get going." He says, kicking off the ground and swinging himself in a high arc, "I'll always be waiting for you, but that doesn't mean you should stick around. You have a life to go live."

Mafuyu knows this is the last time he'll see him for a long while, so let's himself watch as Yuki swings beside him. The way his body moves, the way the light hits his earrings, the way the wind messes with his hair. Just five more minutes. Five more minutes will be enough.

"I love you, Yuki."

"I know. I always knew. It's okay, Mafuyu."

Mafuyu wakes slowly, hanging onto the last dregs of his dream. But it's much warmer here, and he feels the pressure of an arm strewn across his chest. Somehow in the night he and Ritsuka managed to switch positions, so now Mafuyu's on his back with Ritsuka's limbs all over him and his face smashed into his shoulder. It makes his cheeks look squishy in a way that's hopelessly endearing. His mouth is slightly open, and his eyebrows are fully relaxed. It would all make him look much younger if it weren't for the ever-so-faint shadow of stubble on his jaw. Mafuyu hasn't ever really had the chance to inspect Ritsuka's face this closely for this long without him eventually getting embarrassed and covering it with his hands. So Mafuyu takes full advantage, scanning the lines of his cheekbone and jaw.

Discovering a mole behind his ear. Resisting the urge to touch his eyelashes. They're so *long*. Mafuyu had noticed this before, going a little breathless whenever Ritsuka looks at him from underneath them, but he never fully *appreciated*. He has to stop himself from googling the world record for longest natural eyelashes. He gradually expands the range of his attention to Ritsuka's hair, which is a ridiculous mess against the pillow from sleeping on it wet but still soft and dark and shiny. The short hair of his undercut is a satisfying texture to stroke, like velvet. He follows the line of it until it stops and turns into longer strands. He then focuses on his shoulder, with the fabric of Mafuyu's t-shirt straining against it, and the arm falling against him. Now that he looks, he swears Ritsuka's arms are getting thicker. He doesn't remember them looking this strong when they first met. Now Mafuyu has never really considered muscles all that attractive, but as he lightly traces the curves of them with his fingertips, he figures on Ritsuka they're quite nice. But back to his *eyelashes*—

"Stop staring at me when I'm sleeping." Ritsuka's voice is thick with sleep, dropping it to a pitch even lower than normal and it makes Mafuyu's neck erupt with goosebumps. He doesn't think he'll ever admit to anyone the effect that voice just had on him.

"You haven't opened your eyes. How do you know I'm staring at you?"

"How do you know I haven't opened my eyes if you're not staring at me?"

Mafuyu can't think of anything to say to that, and Ritsuka peeks one eye open at him. He sees Mafuyu staring at him and smirks, "I got you."

Now Mafuyu can't have that, so he lets his mouth fall into a pout,

widening his eyes and blinking his eyelashes at Ritsuka, “But you’re so pretty.”

His smile falters, “Oi...that’s not fair...”

Mafuyu holds his angelic stare and it’s turns into a battle of who breaks first, and of course it’s Ritsuka. He groans and throws an arm over his face, “I can’t deal with this at the best of times, never mind first thing in the morning.”

Little does Ritsuka know that Mafuyu can’t deal with the way his *voice* sounds first thing in the morning, and when he goes to speak again Mafuyu cuts him off by kissing his bottom lip. He makes a startled noise, and then something more like a *moan* when Mafuyu rolls on top of him, which *definitely* is not allowed, *especially* when his voice is like that. He tenses up beneath him but then melts, inviting Mafuyu in and tangling his fingers in his hair. He loves him like this. He loves him always, loves teasing him and watching him get embarrassed, but it’s a different type of pleasure watching him get used to being loved. Get used to giving it. He wishes he could find the right words to express that he’s allowed. That Mafuyu won’t break the second he pushes a bit harder. And he will, eventually. He just needs to think about it a bit more. But until then Mafuyu just shows him, in the slide of his lips and the way he presses his body against him, not wanting an inch of room between them. They separate eventually, but only as far as resting against each other’s foreheads, both breathing heavily.

“Hi.” Mafuyu whispers,

“G’morning.” Ritsuka wheezes, making Mafuyu laugh.

“I meant it. I wasn’t just teasing. You are very pretty.”

Ritsuka rolls his eyes but can’t suppress the fond smile that spreads across his face, “Not as pretty as you.”

Mafuyu feels himself blush, at the compliment and how proud he is of Ritsuka for saying it. But he stares at him, looking up at him from the pillows with his stupid *eyes* and his stupid *cheekbones* and comes to the conclusion that Ritsuka is wrong. “Your eyelashes are so long...” he whispers, getting distracted by them again.

Ritsuka huffs, but then quickly covers his mouth with his hand, “Sorry, my breath probably stinks.”

Mafuyu inwardly laughs at him, Ritsuka’s terrible at this. “It’s okay.

Your face is scratchy though.” He says, running his fingers along his jaw.

“Ahh sorry, I need to shave.”

“It’s okay, I kind of like it. How often do you need to shave?”

“Uhh- I-like once every 2 weeks? Or s-something? It’s not a proper beard though, just stupid patches.”

Mafuyu hums, kisses Ritsuka once more and then moves down to settle on his chest, still stroking the rough skin on his jaw.

“Do you want to get up anytime soon?” Mafuyu asks,

“Mmmm, maybe like five more minutes?”

It’s an innocent phrase, said in passing. No great meaning to it. But it brings Mafuyu back to the swings, back to the ocean. Mafuyu must freeze or tense up or *something* because all of a sudden Ritsuka has a hand on his face and is asking what’s wrong.

Mafuyu hesitates, caught between telling him the truth and not wanting to hurt his feelings. They’ve just gotten back to normal. Yesterday he was crying over how insecure he’d gotten over Yuki, Mafuyu doesn’t want to make it worse.

“Mafuyu, please tell me. Whatever it is.”

He stays silent for a long time, trying to find the right words. “I had... a dream...last night.” Mafuyu stammers through, “he—Yuki, was there.” He hesitates again, but Ritsuka starts stroking his hair, silently waiting for him to continue.

“Mmmm...five more minutes was a thing he used to say...a lot. Whenever he wanted me to remember something, we’d always do it ‘five more minutes’. So...I was just...reminded...”, he clenches his fists in Ritsuka’s shirt, “I’m so sorry.”

“What for?”

“You just said a normal sentence and I—things were good again and—it’s a weird thing to get upset about and I shouldn’t have brought it up and now I’ve made you sad and—”

“I’m not sad.”

Mafuyu looks up at him, “You’re not?”

“I mean...I don’t like it when you’re upset, obviously. But I think I hate it more when I don’t know if you’re upset, or when I don’t understand *why*.” Ritsuka hesitates, but never stops playing with Mafuyu’s hair, “Like...with the song...it was because I wanted to help you, but I also wanted...I don’t know, to understand him better?” He sighs, lifting a strand of Mafuyu’s fringe and letting it fall again. “Yuki... he was a big part of your life, right? So, I thought...if I could understand him...I could understand you better too.”

Mafuyu doesn’t say anything, *can’t* say anything, so Ritsuka keeps going, “I just want to understand you, so I know how to help you. Make you happy and stuff. I hate that I keep getting it wrong and hurting you.”

Mafuyu tilts his head down and presses his face into Ritsuka’s chest. He can’t look at him anymore. With his soft eyes and soft voice and soft words. It’s too much. He’s too good. Too kind, too sweet, too *whole* for a broken person like Mafuyu. Mafuyu, who only causes pain to the people he cares about. He’s...cursed. Evil. Selfish. He doesn’t want to taint Ritsuka’s light with his own darkness. Mafuyu feels his throat tighten with all the words he wants to say, but chokes out “You deserve better than me.”

“Huh?? No I don—”

“You do! You’re good! You’re so good! And I’m—” Mafuyu trips up over his words. There’s so much he wants to say, so much he needs Ritsuka to understand so he can stop wasting his kindness on someone like Mafuyu. He doesn’t want to hurt him anymore. He hates that he can never find the right words. He hates himself so much. Mafuyu doesn’t know when he started crying, only notices when Ritsuka’s bandaged hand moves to wipe his tears. Hurt because of him. “I’m not! I’m terrible, I’m evil, I don’t deserve to be loved like you love me.”

Ritsuka looks at him in shock. *Stop it. Stop being so kind. Shout at me, break my heart, I deserve it.*

“Mafuyu, that’s not t—”

“It is true! The last words I ever said to him was ‘would you die for me then?’. The last ones!” His voice chokes off with a violent wave of sobs as Mafuyu realises what he’s just said. *It’s okay, now he knows. He won’t forgive me. I’ve destroyed it. He’s saved from me.* His words are

always so ugly. He imagines Ritsuka getting up and leaving, and never talking to him again. It hurts, it hurts so much, but it'd be better that way. Ritsuka would have a chance to love someone whole, like him.

At least, that's what should have happened. But instead, Ritsuka circles both arms around him and rolls them to the side, tucking Mafuyu under his chin and to his chest and holding him there. He shushes him and rocks him gently, like a crying baby.

Stop it. Let me go. But he doesn't struggle, just desperately clutches the front of Ritsuka's t-shirt as he heaves against his chest. He should let go, but he just holds tighter. *I'm weak. I'm selfish. You deserve better. But don't leave. Please don't leave.*

He doesn't leave. Ritsuka stays, holding Mafuyu against his chest and stroking his hair. He smells like home, and his arms feel so safe and Mafuyu unconsciously finds himself timing his breathing to the slow, steady beat of his heart. Before he knows it, he's stopped crying.

"Mafuyu...can you tell me what happened?"

He should tell him. He deserves to know. He deserves to make the decision for himself, and Mafuyu will just have to deal with the consequences. But how can he even begin to explain the magnitude of his and Yuki's relationship, without making Ritsuka doubt everything they currently have together? He doesn't even know how to talk about simple feelings, never mind this complicated *mess*.

"I'll listen as long as it takes you. You don't have to say everything perfectly all the time, you know?" Ritsuka whispers, lightly kissing him on the forehead.

He deserves better. But also, *he deserves to know.* "Me and Yuki...we grew up together." Mafuyu begins, mumbling in a monotone against Ritsuka's chest. He can't look at him. "We met when we were kids. He was there when my father got taken to prison. My father...he used to hit me and my mum." He hears Ritsuka suck in a breath, but he stays silent, not wanting to interrupt him when he's finally started talking.

"He was there for everything really...I don't really know when we started...you know." Mafuyu hesitates. He doesn't want to talk about this, not with Ritsuka. He won't want to hear it. It'll hurt him. But Ritsuka gives him a squeeze and whispers in his ear to keep going, so he tries again, "By middle school everyone just assumed we were dating, and we just...didn't argue with it."

A deep breath, “We went to different high schools. He started the band with Hiiragi and Shizu, and started part-time jobs to pay for the band. So between all that, I never saw him. It felt like...he was being taken away from me. *Music* was taking him away from me.”

He wants to cry again. He wants to cry, but he needs to finish the story. He needs to get it out of his heart. “We had an argument. He... he said he’d give up music, for me. That he’d do anything, that he couldn’t live without me, so I....” Despite his best efforts, tears start to fall from Mafuyu’s eyes and his throat seizes up. He can’t say it. Not again. But Ritsuka waits. Stroking his hair. He waits as long as Mafuyu needs until he can keep going, until he says in the smallest voice possible “I asked him to die for me. And I found him two days later. He really did it. He died for me Ritsuka.”

Mafuyu takes in a deep shuddering breath. He remembers the cans, the bottles strewn across the floor. The stool toppled sideways. His feet, still in socks, a foot above the floor. The bruises—he shakes his head violently to rid himself of the images of his boyfriend’s dead body, and Ritsuka places both hands on either side of his face forcing him to look up at him. Mafuyu is surprised to find Ritsuka’s eyes full of tears, but still full of kindness. It confuses him.

“You know it wasn’t your fault, right?” It’s the last thing Mafuyu expects to hear.

“How can you say that?” How can he hear the evil things Mafuyu said to the boy he loved and come to *that* conclusion?

“It wasn’t your fault.” *Stop it.*

“But—”

“It wasn’t your fault.” *Stop it! You can’t save me. I don’t deser—* “It wasn’t your fault, Mafuyu.”

“But I *asked* him—”

“That doesn’t make it your fault! If you asked me to die for you, I wouldn’t do it. If you asked your mum to die for you, she wouldn’t do it. Healthy people don’t just kill themselves. There must have been something *wrong before—*”

“But you don’t know that!” *Please stop. Please. Please—*

“I do!” He almost sounds angry, “Even so, you shouldn’t have

responsibility over someone's life and death just because of something you said in the middle of an argument! You're a kid! Mafuyu..." Ritsuka stops himself and brings his head down to rest his forehead against Mafuyu's, making scorching eye contact. That familiar determined stare.

His voice goes soft again, "It wasn't your fault."

Mafuyu stares back at him helplessly. He so badly wants to believe him. So badly wants to forgive himself.

"Mafuyu...you deserve...so much better than the world has given you."

But the world has given Mafuyu Uenoyama Ritsuka and right now Mafuyu can't think of a single thing better than that. Mafuyu closes his eyes and presses his face against Ritsuka's neck, breathing him in.

"Thank you...for existing."

Ritsuka chuckles, and Mafuyu can feel the vibrations against his face, "I know I'm dumb, and I can't help much, and I don't know you as well as someone who knew you most of your life. But I'd like to get there some day. I'm here, I'm not going anywhere."

He's here. He's really here. Mafuyu can feel the pressure of his weight against him. Can hear his heartbeat, smell his skin, feel his breath tickling his hair. "You always manage to say the thing I most need to hear when I most need to hear it." Mafuyu whispers, "I don't deser—"

"Shhh," Ritsuka playfully smacks him on the back of the head, "Stop that. Only I get to decide that. And I've decided that I love you, and only you, okay?"

Mafuyu looks at the blue eyes in desperation, looking for any kind of indication that Ritsuka is lying. But he only sees love in the boy's unwavering stare. For once, he looks at Mafuyu without breaking.

"Yes sir."

Mafuyu wraps his arms around Ritsuka's neck and squeezes, trying to hide his face in the shoulder joint. His heart feels so full it's almost overwhelming. This boy is so good, he can't be real. But Ritsuka rolls him over until he's on top of him and starts kissing Mafuyu's face everywhere he can reach. Between each kiss he whispers 'I love you' in that soft voice he only uses for Mafuyu, and Mafuyu wants to cry.

All of a sudden he's happy, and he's laughing and it's so *good*. The light coming in through a gap in Mafuyu's curtains hits Ritsuka as he perches above him, illuminating him from behind. His eyes are closed from the size of his smile, and his lashes fan out along flushed cheekbones and it knocks the air right out of Mafuyu's lungs. *So beautiful. He can't be real.* He feels like salvation.

Mafuyu moves a hand to Ritsuka's cheek, "You're real right? I didn't dream you up?" he ponders.

Ritsuka laughs into Mafuyu's hair, "No, I'm real." He moves Mafuyu's hand off his cheek and onto his chest, so Mafuyu can feel his heartbeat. "See?"

Mafuyu pulls him down by the neck and kisses him gently, and Ritsuka kisses him back immediately. *I love you I love you I love you.* It doesn't last for long, just enough to know that they're okay. Ritsuka rolls off him and settles on his side beside Mafuyu and Mafuyu curls into his chest once again. It feels safe.

"You know, you forget to be embarrassed when you're trying to cheer me up."

Ritsuka rolls his eyes, "Well that's because there's more important things to worry about when you're upset."

"I've never talked about this with anyone. About Yuki."

"Mafuyu, you sang a whole song about it. And the whole reason Given is called Given is because Yuki's mum gave you your guitar. You told us that before."

"Yeah but..." Mafuyu thinks for a second. He wants Ritsuka to understand how important he is. "It's easy to just throw something out like 'my dead boyfriend' in conversation because it's telling people without really *telling* people. It makes people uncomfortable, so they don't ask about it anymore but then it stops feeling like you're lying about it. Or the song...that's just...throwing my feelings out. But I've never actually talked about it. With anyone. I don't even think Hiiragi or Shizu know all of it."

This huge secret he was carrying around for a year. The secret he was sure would destroy everything he fought so hard to rebuild...just out there. Ritsuka listened, Ritsuka forgave him. Ritsuka knows, and he's still here.

“Oh...” he’s back to blushing again, and it makes Mafuyu smile, “Thank you then...for trusting me with it. I know it’s hard for you to talk like this.”

“Thank you for getting me this far.”

They both smile, remembering their first kiss. It feels like so long ago. The hole in his heart...it’s definitely gotten smaller.

“Do you have a photo of him? It feels weird that I don’t know what he looks like.”

Mafuyu hums and scrabbles blindly in the sheets to find his phone. He scrolls through his camera roll, surprised at how long it takes for him to get to the pictures of Yuki. So much has happened, so much of his life has changed since Yuki was here. It’s a very bittersweet feeling. He decides on a photo of the four childhood friends. He doesn’t really remember the exact day it was taken, but he remembers the feeling. The four of them in their own little world. Shizu’s actually smiling in this one.

Ritsuka looks at it and smiles, “Ahh...he’s handsome...”

“He was. But so are you.”

“I wasn’t being jealous!” Ritsuka exclaims. He scratches the back of his neck, “I’m allowed to find guys handsome now, right?” There’s something *off* about the way he says it, something a bit unsure. But before Mafuyu can probe, Ritsuka starts talking again, “Should I get my ears pierced? Yuki has them, Hiiragi has them—”

“You just want to look like Kaji-san.”

“No!” he exclaims again, and Mafuyu giggles at him, “Shut up...so what if I do?”

“I think it’s cute.” He moves to give his boyfriend a kiss on the cheek, but in doing so he accidentally gives Ritsuka a glimpse of his camera roll. The most recent months are almost entirely filled with pictures he’s secretly taken of Ritsuka. Photos of times Mafuyu thought he looked beautiful, and times he looked stupid. Playing with Kedama, playing the guitar, napping on the stairwell and in the practise room. Lots of little moments. Times when he was happy, to remember when he’s feeling sad.

Ritsuka snatches the phone away and starts scrolling, “How many

photos do you have of me on here??”

Mafuyu snatches the phone back, “Not that many! You’re my boyfriend, I like having photos of you.”

They stare at each other for a second, both flushed up to their ears, until they both burst into laughter. “You know you should take photos *with* me, not *of* me.”

“Ehh? I always thought you’d say no.”

“Mafuyu, when do I actually ever say no to you?”

Mafuyu giggles, “Fine then.”

He pulls Ritsuka’s face towards him with one hand, kissing his cheek, whilst raising the other hand to take a picture. In the photo, both boys are blushing and Ritsuka is caught mid-laugh.

“Ahh it’s cute!” Mafuyu exclaims,

“My eyes aren’t even open...” Ritsuka complains. So they take more. Stupid ones and sickeningly sweet ones, until Ritsuka can’t take it anymore and covers his face. Mafuyu takes a few more of him like that, just for good measure.

“Send those to me.” He says, even through his embarrassment.

“I will. I’m gonna make the first one my phone background.”

“Ahh I would, but I don’t want my parents to see...” There it is again. That something *off* in his voice.

“Do they not know yet?”

Ritsuka goes to scratch his neck again, “No...Yayoi found out and she...well. She’s fine about it now, but...” he trails off.

“But...?”

“But...she wasn’t the nicest. Called me weird and unnatural and stuff...”

“Oh...Ritsuka...I didn’t know...” Mafuyu thinks of him dealing with that all by himself. It’s something he’s never experienced.

“I mean she said sorry. And she’s actually given me advice and stuff

about you since, so it's fine. It's just..."

"It still bothers you."

"Yeah I guess?" He sighs, "I'm not ashamed of you or anything! I love you. And this...it feels right, and it feels good. But I just...I still feel like...there's something *wrong* with me, sometimes."

Mafuyu shifts his position to hover above Ritsuka, brushing his hair out of his face and dipping down to kiss the tip of his nose. It makes him smile. "There's nothing wrong with you."

"I know, I know. I'm...working on it. I just don't think I'm ready to tell them yet. I'm sorry."

Mafuyu kisses him again, "It's okay. There's no rush. I talk about you all the time with my mum though."

"You do?"

"Yeah...I know you haven't met her yet, but she loves you already. She thinks you're great."

"Oh...cool." He doesn't say anything else, but Mafuyu can tell from his face that it means a lot to him. Mafuyu knows he has no control over how Ritsuka's family will react but finds comfort in the fact that even if the worst should happen, he'll always be welcome here. In his home.

"Are you hungry?"

"Mmmm, a little bit?"

"We could take Tama for a walk and get some food? I think it's almost lunchtime..."

"Yeah, sounds good. Just..."

"Hmm?"

"Two more seconds..."

Ritsuka plants two hands on Mafuyu's face and pulls him down into a kiss. Mafuyu goes willingly, smiling into it. *Completely hopeless*. The two boys give and take in a gentle rhythm, pressing forward and pushing back. He bites Ritsuka's bottom lip, feels drunk with the noises it forces from him. Ritsuka bites his top lip back, and it makes

Mafuyu's toes tingle. Everyday Ritsuka gets more comfortable, in himself and the connection between them, and Mafuyu is so proud. He feels drunk, finally experiencing the intimacy he's been craving from him. Understanding, and feeling understood. Wherever he goes, Ritsuka meets him halfway. He trusts this now.

Once again, the two boys separate by laughing against each other's lips. "I love you, Ritsuka."

Ritsuka beams from underneath him, and he's beautiful. "I love you too, Mafuyu. Now, let's get going."

Mafuyu goes. He has a life to go live, after all.

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